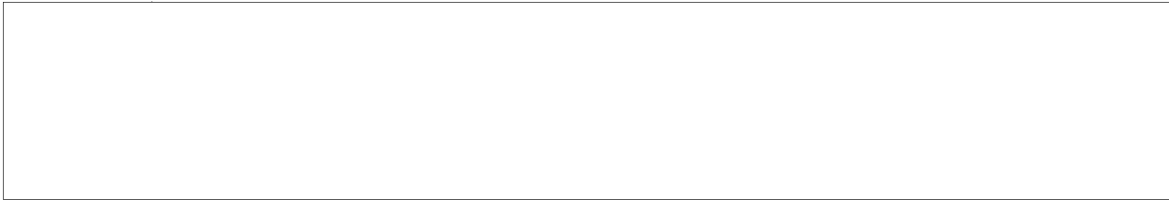


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COUNTRY:

USSR

SUBJECT:

MILITARY THOUGHT: "Some Questions
on the Theory of Military Art", by Colonel
General I. Gusevskiy

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Some Questions on the Theory of Military Art

by

Colonel-General I. Gusakovskiy

In the pages of the first and second issues of the Special Collection, a sharp and fundamental controversy has developed concerning the most important questions of strategy, operational art, and tactics. Of particular interest are the contributions of those authors who raise new problems relating to the nature of modern warfare, the methods of conducting armed combat, the use in it of the various types of armed forces, etc. As a matter for discussion, we consider it necessary to express our opinion on a number of questions raised in the article of Colonel-General A. Gastilovich.¹

The first question concerns the length of a future war. As is known, General A. Gastilovich advocates the idea of a "blitzkrieg", determining the direction of our military development in accordance with this. In his opinion we have "no need to fear the term 'blitzkrieg' just because this concept was compromised by the experience of past world wars. Under the conditions of nuclear war only 'blitz' operations can promise victory." With this basic argument in defense of the theory of "blitzkrieg", General A. Gastilovich cites the availability in the armament of modern armies of nuclear/missile weapons, by means of which entire countries can be put out of a war in its first days. This situation, as the article indicates, "will hardly evoke enthusiasm in the remaining countries for its prolongation." Therefore, the author concludes, "he who has withstood the first strikes, must and can conclude the war rapidly if he prepares his armed forces properly in peacetime."

¹Special Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought",
First Issue, 1960/

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Proceeding from the considerations cited above, General A. Gastilovich suggests a rather simple "concept of conducting initial operations under conditions of the European Theater". According to this concept a powerful retaliatory nuclear strike with weapons of megaton yield is launched at the beginning with the aim of putting two or three NATO countries out of the war. Following this, ground troop operations are developed which mop up the remaining enemy forces and occupy enemy countries. To conduct such operations, in the opinion of the author, not more than 30 to 40 divisions will be required. The concept indicated, "to the same degree, with certain corrections for geographical conditions, can also be applied in other theaters". In short, the substance of war in the concept of General A. Gastilovich boils down to border engagements of the opposing sides with a subsequent unimpeded advance of our troops onto the territory of the enemy.

In our opinion, such a point of view on the nature of armed combat does not conform to modern reality. We realize perfectly clearly that a future war unleashed by an aggressor against the Soviet Union will inevitably become a world war between the two contending social systems of the world. The basic means of waging the war will undoubtedly be nuclear/missile weapons, and the theater of military operations will be the entire globe. Therefore, it would be naive to think that such a war between coalitions of countries possessing tremendous military-economic power can be concluded by a "blitzkrieg", with one strike. It will be, without doubt, an intense, hard, and exceptionally fierce war with decisive political and military objectives. This is the kind of war for which we must prepare our armed forces in order to ensure the security of our Homeland.

One may ask, is it correct under these conditions to orient the military leadership toward a "blitzkrieg"? In our opinion, it is not correct. The theory of a "blitzkrieg" is calculated for a weak enemy, incapable of withstanding nuclear/missile strikes and continuing the war after huge materiel losses and human casualties. One cannot approach the evaluation of our probable enemy with such a yardstick. We must proceed, first of all, from the fact that in a future world war, if it is unleashed by the imperialists, we will have to fight against the coalition of a strong enemy who has at his disposal all the modern means

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of combat and who is capable of recovering after the first nuclear/missile strikes are inflicted on him. To count on victory over such an enemy by a "blitzkrieg" is not to take into account the real relative strengths and potentialities of the opposing sides, but is to underestimate the aggressor. This is very dangerous. The stern lessons of history oblige us to prepare in the most serious manner for a hard and long war against a strong and crafty enemy. This, of course, does not mean that the third world war will necessarily assume a protracted character. Modern means of combat permit gaining victory over the aggressor in relatively short periods of time, for which we will strive. It may be that this war will in fact assume a fast-moving "blitz" character. However, this is improbable. The interests of assuring the security of our Homeland demand from us that in building the Soviet Armed Forces, we do not go to extremes and do not nourish the illusion of victory by "blitzkrieg" operations, but that we prepare in earnest for a protracted and hard war.

As is known, the theory of "blitzkrieg" is not new. It failed completely in the Second World War. Today it is advocated by various Western military figures who threaten to destroy the Soviet Union and other Socialist countries in a few hours. In this, these theoreticians rely basically on a sudden strike by nuclear/missile weapons. However, they do not allow for the fact that the Socialist Camp cannot only withstand the initial nuclear strikes of the aggressor, but can also give him the necessary reply. N. S. Khrushchev stated this well in his speech at the IVth Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR:

"Let us assume, however, that some country or group of countries could successfully prepare and execute a surprise attack on a power possessing nuclear and missile weapons. But, even supposing for a minute that the attacking side could successfully execute a surprise strike, could it really immediately put out of action all stockpiles of nuclear weapons and all missile equipment installations of the power suffering the attack? Of course not. The country suffering the surprise attack, if it is understood that the discussion concerns a sufficiently large country, will always have the potential to duly repulse the aggressor".

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It is perfectly clear to us which countries N. S. Khrushchev had in mind. Apparently our enemies are also taking this situation into account, since in their camp voices are heard more and more persistently denouncing "blitzkrieg", demanding a renunciation of the strategy of so-called "massive retaliation" and a switch to the creation and preparation of reserves of all types for the possible conduct of a long and protracted war.

On what basis must we glorify the idea of "blitzkrieg", which has been condemned by history, and elevate it to the rank of a theory which points the way of further development of the armed forces? In our opinion, the presence in armament of strategic nuclear/missile weapons still does not give us a sufficient basis to assert that the third world war will have the character of a "blitzkrieg." To propagate the idea of "blitzkrieg" under our conditions is not only dangerous but is also harmful, insofar as it disorients the military leadership in the building of the armed forces and in securing the defensive capability of our Homeland.

The second question concerns the numerical strength of the armed forces. The thought runs through the article of General A. Gastilovich that "for direct combat operations at the front neither in the beginning of the war nor during its course will such numerous ground armed forces be needed as was the case in previous wars?" The author believes that in a future war engagements of multimillion-man armed forces are excluded, and that victorious war can be waged with the forces of small, technically highly equipped armies.

To support his statements, the author advances the following arguments: 1) In modern war "nothing will arrive from the depth of the country in time", so it is impossible to build up forces in initial operations with fully mobilized large units. 2) The forces of the enemy remaining after the first nuclear strikes are inflicted cannot be numerous, and a numerically large army is not needed to crush them. Proceeding from these considerations, General A. Gastilovich proposes, for the conduct of initial operations in the European theater of military operations, to have a small number of various divisions (within the bounds of 30 to 40), organizationally represented by two fronts of 15 to 20 divisions each.

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We cannot agree with such conclusions of the author on the numerical strength of armed forces in modern war. Their unsoundness is convincingly shown by Colonel-General G. Khetagurov in his article (Special Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought" /Second Issue, 1960/), with which we are in complete agreement on this question. It seems to us that the judgments of General A. Gastilovich on the numerical strength of armed forces are an attempt to revive the well-known theory of waging war by the forces of small armies. Similar ideas have often been expressed in the foreign press, but they have not found practical application in the past, and do not find it today. Our enemies, as is known, are preparing for the deployment of rather significant ground, air, and naval forces in a future war and it would be a grave error for us to orient ourselves on waging war with small armies.

A future war, as we have already emphasized, is a world war between two powerful coalitions of states hostile to each other because of their social structures, it is a war of multi-million-man armies with numerous and complex combat equipment. As opposed to previous wars, a nuclear/missile war will be characterized by a still greater spatial scope, when in the literal sense of the word there will be no difference between the front and rear of a country, when the territory of countries will be turned into theaters of military operations. For conducting such a war, massive armed forces will be required, still larger than was the case in past wars. And this is completely natural, because the involvement in war of a large number of countries, the high spatial scope of armed combat, and also the necessity for recovering from heavy losses will inescapably lead to the quantitative growth of the warring armies, to a still greater degree than was the case in the past.

In our opinion, we should prepare our armed forces for just such a war. This, of course, does not mean that we must increase our army in peacetime. The defensive power of our country, N. S. Khrushchev indicated, is determined not by how many soldiers we have under arms or by how many people wear soldiers' overcoats, but by the firepower of our armed forces. At present, the Soviet Army possesses such combat means as to permit not only withstanding the probable enemy in case of attack, but also to strike back as

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necessary. Under these conditions, a reduction in the numerical strength of the army will not prevent us from maintaining the defensive capability of our Homeland at the necessary level. Therefore, guided by the policy of peaceful coexistence, the Soviet Union is significantly reducing its armed forces on a unilateral basis, paving the way for an easing of the international situation and the strengthening of peace in the entire world. N. S. Khrushchev spoke of the reasons for the further reductions in our armed forces sufficiently convincingly at the IVth Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. However, in reducing the numerical strength of the army, we do not at all count on waging war with small armies in the event that we are attacked. For conducting a victorious war, a significant increase in the armed forces and the deployment of a multimillion-man army will undoubtedly be needed. From these positions it is necessary to decide the questions of our further military development.

The third question concerns the methods of conducting military operations. The high degree to which troops are technically equipped, and the appearance in the armament of armies of nuclear/missile weapons undoubtedly introduces much that is new into the methods of conducting war. First of all, the role and assignment of various types of armed forces and arms of troops in wartime is substantially changed. A decisive role in modern war will be played by the missile troops, especially those armed with strategic missiles, and also by missile weapons of the other types of armed forces. At the same time, conventional types of armament will find wide application in war. Only by the combined efforts of all types of armed forces and means of combat can the assigned goals of a war be attained.

It is perfectly obvious that nuclear/missile weapons dictate a new approach to the conduct of both offense and defense. However, in the investigation of this question, one should not go to extremes for the sake of trying to find something new in military affairs. Thus, General A. Gastilovich asserts that "in the training of troops, it is necessary to reject decisively the cultivation of the principle of breakthrough of the enemy's prepared defenses" insofar as this "has ceased

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to be the primary form of offensive actions, having yielded to meeting engagements and envelopment." We cannot agree with this assertion of the author.

In our view, breakthrough of the enemy's defenses remains as a type of offensive action under conditions of a nuclear/missile war, although it will not be executed in the same manner as in World War II. While in the past it was essential to concentrate a large number of forces and weapons to execute the breakthrough from a position of direct contact, and to conduct the offensive itself on the entire front and in close formations, in order to effect a breakthrough of prepared defenses under modern conditions this question will be solved differently. The primary means of breakthrough is now nuclear/missile weapons, with which the enemy's defenses can be broken to the entire depth in short periods of time and by subsequent swift operations of troops from the rear they can be broken through with a rush and the rout of the opposing grouping completed. In our opinion, the swift breakthrough of defense subsequent to nuclear strikes will be the basic content of offensive operations. Moreover, the offensive itself, as opposed to past wars, will be conducted in separate areas, at high tempos and with wide use of airborne troops and transport of troops by air.

It is quite clear that under conditions of a war of maneuver, meeting battles (engagements) with the enemy's reserves will occur very often, and also the execution of enveloping maneuver of troops with the aim of emerging at a considerable depth in the enemy's positions and capturing his most important areas (installations). Therefore, in training troops in peacetime it is essential to prepare them both for the precipitous breakthrough of the enemy's prepared defenses and for meeting engagements. To reject the mastering of the methods of breakthrough of the enemy's prepared defenses in the training of troops, as General A. Gastilovich proposes, means to consciously ruin the field training of troops and to lower their combat readiness.

Advancing the thesis that meeting engagements are the basic form of offensive operations, the author proceeds from the considerations that modern defense must be based "on the same methods of

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operation as offensive operations, i. e., on heated meeting battles and engagements." In other words, in the opinion of General A. Gastilovich, the operational methods of troops in both defensive and offensive operations will be identical. Lieutenant-General V. Baskakov arrives at approximately the same conclusion, declaring that under conditions of nuclear/missile warfare the distinctions between an operational offensive and operational defense are obliterated.¹ Consequently, says General A. Gastilovich, in the formation of operational defense one must reject the creation of defensive zones "because they do not justify their designation" and relegate the very term "stable defense" to the archives.

We cannot agree with such a definition of operational defense and operational offense. On this question we completely share the opinion of General of the Army P. Kurochkin, as stated in his article.²

Without doubt, linear defense along entire fronts has departed to the realm of the past. Its place will be taken, apparently, by highly maneuvered, swift defensive battles and engagements of a heated nature. The decisive role in defense will be played by nuclear/missile weapons which permit the defenders to disrupt completely the enemy's offensive and to assume the offensive quickly in their turn with the aim of completely routing the enemy. In this case, troop operations will most closely resemble an offensive against an enemy who has hastily turned to the defense, and in some cases also meeting battles (engagements).

The rejection of positional forms of combat in defense does not at all signify a denial of the firm retention of important areas and installations in the direction in which the enemy's offensive is

¹Special Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", First Issue, 1960.

²Special Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought", Second Issue, 1960.

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expected. It appears to us that under the conditions of nuclear/missile war, also, the structure of the defense and accordingly, of groupings of troops, must answer the problem of retaining the basic areas of terrain in the probable directions of the enemy's offensive. In the interests of fulfilling this mission, nuclear strikes, troop maneuver and counterattacks and counterstrikes must be planned. We apply this proposition to tactical as well as to operational defense. Therefore, it seems to us that it is still too early to relegate the term "stable defense" to the archives. On the contrary, nuclear/missile weapons give it a new content, directed at attaining important results in defense that neither artillery nor aviation could give in the past. In this connection, neither is it possible to equate defense and offense. These two types of combat operations of troops differ in principle from one another not by the amount of nuclear weapons, as General A. Gastilovich stated, but by their goals and methods.

A few words about the planning of missile operations. General A. Gastilovich proposes the conduct of two types of missile operations by the missile formations of the V GK (Supreme High Command): operations with the aim of completely destroying the enemy's country and putting it out of the war, and operations in support of the ground troops. Missile operations of the first type must precede operations of the second type and subsequently be conducted parallel to them. In accordance with this, in the opinion of the author, among the missile formations of the V GK it is essential to have missile formations to carry out the mission of putting entire countries out of the war, and formations designated for operations in support of several fronts conducting operations in one strategic axis.

It appears to us that there is no necessity to plan the above-named two types of missile operations and, by the same token, there is no need to create corresponding missile formations for this. In our opinion, one missile operation must already be planned and prepared in peacetime with the mission of destroying the enemy's nuclear weapons, damaging his economic potential, disrupting the various types of transportation, and crushing his grouping of ground troops in the theater of impending operations of our troops. This mission

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can be fulfilled simultaneously by one and the same missile formations of the VGK, together with the missile means of the fronts conducting operations on a given strategic axis. It is possible that under certain conditions it will be necessary to conduct an independent missile operation with the aim of completely destroying the economic potential of one of the enemy countries and putting it out of the war. But for this, the same VGK missile formations which will subsequently conduct operations in support of ground troops can be used. It is therefore inadvisable to separate the missile formations of the VGK artificially into two groups.

In conclusion, we wish to note that we welcome with great interest the publication of the Special Collection and the participation in it of authors who express their thoughts and proposals freely on extremely important problems of military theory. There is no doubt that the creation of this Collection will promote the further development of Soviet military art.

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